

## **BENEFICIARY TRAVEL FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Eligibility for Travel**

**Q:** Who is eligible for travel?

**A:** -Veterans rated 30% or more SC for travel relating to any condition  
-Veterans rated less than 30% for travel relating to their SC condition  
-Veterans receiving VA pension benefits for all conditions  
-Veterans with annual income below the maximum applicable annual rate of pension for all conditions  
-Veterans who can present clear evidence that they are unable to defray the cost of travel  
-Veterans traveling in relation to a Compensation and Pension (C&P) Examination  
-Veterans in an authorized Vocational Rehabilitation Program for all conditions  
-Certain veterans in certain emergency situations  
-Certain non-veterans when related to care of a veteran (attendants, donors)  
-Allied Beneficiaries

### **Types of Travel**

**Q:** What travel can the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provide?

**A:** VA has authority to provide eligible beneficiaries reimbursement for mileage, special mode transportation (when medically justified by a VA health care provider), and in certain circumstances, taxi or hired car.

### **Mileage Rates**

**Q:** What are current mileage rates for travel? Why are rates different for veterans and VA employees?

**A:** VA currently reimburses .11/mile for ALL veteran travel, including C&P exams. When VA has determined that a *deficiency* exists in relation to a C&P exam (need to repeat a lab test, x-ray, or through no fault of the veteran not all exams in relation to the C&P were completed) reimbursement is .17/mile. This is travel for the "Convenience of the Government". Mileage rates for veterans and VA employees are determined under separate authorities and take different criteria under account. Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 111 and 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 17.143-145 are authorities for Beneficiary Travel. 41 CFR Chapter 301 provides guidance for employee travel.

### **Special Mode**

**Q:** How is it determined that a veteran requires "Special Mode" transportation? What eligibility requirements must be met?

**A:** Special mode transportation includes ambulance, ambulette, air ambulance, wheelchair van, and other modes which are specially designed to transport certain disabled individuals. *Special mode DOES NOT include public transportation such as taxi, bus, subway, train, airplane, or privately owned conveyance.*

In order to be eligible for special mode transportation two criteria must be met. The veteran first has to be administratively eligible for transport at VA expense. Unless this basic criterion is met the veteran *is not* eligible for special mode transportation.

Once administrative eligibility is established, a VA clinician must then determine that a special mode of transportation is clinically required to transport the veteran for VA health care. Unless one of the forms of special mode transportation is required and documented as such, this method of transportation is inappropriate. Should it be clinically determined at one VA facility that such transportation is required, this should be accepted at all VA facilities, unless there is reason to think a veteran's condition may have changed. Local procedures should be established to determine special mode requirements, as well as communication guidelines to other VA facilities when it is necessary to send veterans with this requirement to Tertiary Care, other VA facilities, or non-VA providers for treatment.

### **Mileage Rate Increase**

**Q:** With the price of gas increasing, the mileage rate does not cover expenses. Is the mileage rate going to change?

**A:** Beneficiary Travel is a discretionary program. Money for provision of Beneficiary Travel comes directly from the yearly health care appropriation for VA, therefore, any money used for Travel directly impacts that available for direct patient care. The Secretary is required to undertake a yearly evaluation in order to determine whether VA has sufficient funds to continue to provide veteran transportation, and whether any rate changes should occur. VA spent approximately \$172 million in FY 2003 for Beneficiary Travel. A recent evaluation indicated that raising the mileage rates 5 cents to .22 and .16 per mile would increase travel costs at least another \$24 million per year. An increase in mileage rates to that of federal employees (currently 36.5 cents per mile) would cost approximately \$127 million per year. Therefore, due to the recent rapid increase in veteran patient workload, the Secretary has decided to maintain the current rates of reimbursement and not decrease funds available for direct medical care.

### **Travel Discretion**

**Q:** How much discretion does a facility have if a veteran does not meet eligibility standards and extenuating circumstances exist?

**A:** There is no authority to provide transportation at VA expense for veterans who do not meet eligibility requirements, except in the case of Organ Transplants (VHA Directive 2001-027).

### **Ineligible Beneficiaries**

**Q:** Is there anything we can do to obtain travel for ineligible beneficiaries?

**A:** When a veteran does not meet eligibility for Beneficiary Travel, other sources, including the DAV network, family and community should be aggressively pursued.

VA Form 3068, "Reduced Rate transportation" is also available for field use. This form can be presented to transportation carriers for possible reduced rates for veterans needing to travel in relation to VA health care. It is mainly used for bus transportation; however acceptance by other carriers, including airlines is being explored.

In addition, VA facilities should be pro-active in assisting the veteran explore possible VA options that would give him/her eligibility for Beneficiary Travel. These include:

-Service Connection: Is the veteran potentially eligible? Refer to Service organization, VBA representative, Regional Office, VA Web site

-Housebound/A&A: For veterans not receiving these benefits is their income at or below the income thresholds for these benefits? VHA Directive 2004-026, "Income Thresholds Used in Identifying Veterans Exempt from Extended Care Service and Outpatient Medication Co-payment and in Determining Eligibility for Beneficiary Travel" provides details how veterans not receiving A+A/ housebound may still be determined eligible for Beneficiary Travel.

-“Hardship” review: -Is veteran unable to defray the cost of transportation? Has veteran lost job? Does it appear future income will be less?

### **Fee Basis Travel**

**Q:** Does VA have authority to provide transportation for Fee Basis or visits when an eligible veteran chooses to use private health insurance to pay for care?

**A:** VA has authority to pay for transportation of veterans traveling to VA authorized non-VA health care when a deductible (if applicable) is met. If VA is not paying for the care, travel at VA expense will not be provided.

### **Travel to “Preferred” Facility**

**Q:** What if a veteran chooses to go to his “preferred” facility instead of the closest VA facility that can provide the care?

**A:** Veterans have the choice to go to any VA facility they choose for care. However, travel can only be authorized to the nearest facility *that can provide the needed care*. Therefore, should a *veteran choose* to go to another facility than that closest to his home, he or she is responsible for any costs beyond that for transportation to the closer facility. This includes mileage and special mode transportation.

### **Mileage Determination**

**Q:** How do we determine mileage for reimbursement purposes?

**A:** VA has not established use of a single reference. Mileage should be determined using authoritative guidance such as Rand McNally or Map Quest. Most references are available on line.

### **P.O. Box Address**

**Q:** What if a veteran has a PO BOX and physically lives elsewhere?

**A:** Beneficiary Travel is intended to assist veterans with transportation from their place of residence to the VA health care facility that can provide the needed care. Because of required implementation of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) veterans now have the option of having their official mail sent to any place they choose. However, this does not imply that Travel should be paid from that point. Similarly, a veteran’s home address could be in another state but he or she is currently staying in the area. Therefore, Travel should not necessarily be paid from the distant address. In order to determine appropriate travel reimbursement it is necessary that a veteran establish a current place of residence. If there is any question as to this, a veteran can be asked to provide a bill, or some document establishing his or her address. Should a veteran refuse to provide this information, remember you are only authorized to provide travel to the closest VA facility that can provide the required care, not necessarily where the veteran chooses to seek care or treatment. In those cases should another VA facility be closer to the veteran’s “Home” address and that VA facility can provide the care then Travel reimbursement should only be to that point.

### **\$18 Deductible**

**Q:** Is the \$18 per month deductible for each facility or does it pertain to travel to all VA facilities for health care? Who is required to pay the deductible?

**A:** The \$18 is the *total* monthly deductible amount for travel to all VA facilities. Therefore, should a veteran be going to multiple VA facilities, and the veteran notes this when applying for Travel reimbursement, it is incumbent upon the facility providing the care and travel to contact any other VA facilities to determine if the deductible has been met.

The only exemptions to the deductible are;

- 1) Veterans traveling in conjunction with a C&P examination,
- 2) Non veteran donors,
- 3) Veterans requiring special mode transportation, and
- 4) When it is determined that the imposition of the deductible would cause a severe financial hardship

All other eligible veterans, including those receiving care for SC conditions, are required to have the deductible applied.

### **Facility Responsible for Travel**

**Q:** Which facility is responsible for travel when a veteran is referred to a Tertiary Care facility, or another facility that can provide the needed care on an outpatient basis? For inpatient treatment? What about veterans who do not meet eligibility criteria?

**A:** For outpatient treatment the VA facility that is *providing* the care, or in the case of non-VA care the facility that *authorizes* the care, is responsible for arranging and providing travel to eligible veterans. Therefore, should a VA facility refer/consult a veteran to another VA facility for care, the second facility is responsible for providing travel, as they will be providing the care (as well as authorizing it). For non-VA (FEE Basis) care the VA facility that authorizes and pays for the treatment is responsible for travel. In the case of all outpatient care, including referral to another VA facility, the veteran has to meet eligibility requirements in order to receive travel at VA expense. Should a veteran not meet travel eligibility requirements, other sources such as the DAV network, inter-facility VA transportation networks, family and community resources should be explored.

When it is necessary to transport an inpatient between VA facilities (Inter-facility Travel) the releasing/sending VA facility is responsible for travel. Therefore, the initial transportation will be the responsibility of the first facility, and return transport is the responsibility of second facility. The only exceptions to these rules are for certain VA Special programs such as transplant. Some of these programs require that the sending VA facility provide round trip transportation, both for inpatient and outpatient treatment.

### **Community Nursing Home (CNH) Travel**

**Q:** Who is responsible for transport of veterans in a community nursing home in emergent situations?

**A:** For veterans in a CNH at VA expense the placing VA facility is responsible for travel. Should a CNH veteran be placed in another VA (VISN or facility) Clinic of Jurisdiction (COJ) the initial placing facility will be responsible for travel (and CNH payment) for the first 90 days. After that time, the receiving COJ will be responsible for costs incurred, including travel for VA placement of the veteran. Veterans in a CNH at private expense must meet eligibility requirements for VA payment of non-VA emergency care as well as Beneficiary Travel in order to receive transport at VA expense.

### **Emergency Transport**

**Q:** What authority does VA have to transport veterans in emergency situations?

**A:** *Transport from a VA facility to a community facility for emergency treatment:* When a veteran develops an emergency while receiving care at a VA facility and the facility cannot provide the needed care, transport to a community provider and back to the VA facility can be authorized at VA expense. This is regardless of the veteran's Beneficiary Travel eligibility.

*Transport from any point other than a VA facility to a community facility for emergency treatment:* If the emergency episode of care is approved for VA payment, then transport from the point of emergency to the non-VA facility can be authorized at VA expense. However, once medically stabilized at the community provider the veteran must meet Beneficiary Travel administrative and medical eligibility criteria for further transportation at VA expense.

### **Transport of Non-Veterans**

**Q:** Can VA pay for transport of an attendant, donor or other non-veteran?

**A:** VA has authority to pay for transportation and associated incidental costs (lodging, food, etc.) at VA expense of certain non-veterans.

- 1) When it is clinically determined by a VA provider that due to the veterans mental or physical condition that an attendant is required when transporting the veteran.
- 2) When the non-veteran is the donor or potential donor of tissue, organ, or parts to a veteran receiving VA, or VA authorized non-VA health care.

### **Lodging, Meals, Tolls**

**Q:** Is VA required to pay for lodging, tolls and other ancillary costs as part of authorized travel?

**A:** VA may provide reimbursement for meals, lodging, tolls, and other incidental costs when appropriate. The need for such additional costs should be determined on a case-by-case basis, and based upon the veteran's medical condition, distance required to travel, and any other extenuating circumstances. Reimbursement should not be provided solely because the veteran chooses to stop or take a less direct route to the VA facility.

### **Transport to Other Than Home Address**

**Q:** Does VA have authority to transfer veterans to where they "grew up", or where their family resides?

**A:** VA has limited authority to provide travel for such requests. Only veterans receiving inpatient care at a VA facility, or non-VA facility at VA expense, in a terminal condition (estimated less than 6-months to live) can be transferred to a suitable health care facility in area other than where they lived upon entering the VA facility. In addition such transfer can occur only from one VA facility to another, or when VA is paying for care at a non-VA facility, and future care will be at VA expense. Veterans receiving care on an outpatient basis are not eligible for such transportation.

### **Beneficiary Travel at Outlying VA Facilities**

**Q:** How should Beneficiary Travel at CBOCs or other outlying VA facilities be handled when there isn't a Travel Office or agent cashier agent cashier on station?

**A:** Each "parent" facility must develop local guidelines in order to provide Beneficiary Travel benefits to eligible veterans at remote facilities under their jurisdiction. These must include procedures to capture appropriate documents and signatures in order to meet the requirements of the Program as well as those of other involved Services such as Fiscal.

### **Claims for Beneficiary Travel**

**Q:** How long do veterans have to submit a claim for travel?

**A:** In accordance with Section II b of VA Form 3542, "Authorization to Report – Voucher for Mileage Allowance" claims for reimbursement for travel expenses must be received within 30 days of completion of travel or are forfeit. However, veterans can always submit an "unauthorized claim" for travel in accordance with 38 CFR 17.120. In these cases the veteran can submit a claim within the time frames noted in 38CFR 17.126, "Timely filing".

#### **VA Authorities for Beneficiary Travel**

**Q:** What are the VA authorities for Beneficiary Travel, and where can copies be found?

**A:** The following are current legislative, regulatory and VHA Manual guidelines for VA Beneficiary Travel and can be located at the web sites indicated:

A) 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 111, "Payments or allowances for beneficiary travel",

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>

B) 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 17.143, "Transportation of claimants and beneficiaries"; 17.144, "Limitations"; 17.145, "Approval of unauthorized travel of claimants and beneficiaries"; and 17.1003, "Emergency transportation" (Mill Bill)

<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/>

C) VHA Manual M-1, Part 1, Chapter 25, "Beneficiary Travel"

<http://vaww.va.gov/publ/direc/health/publications.asp?publ=manual&order=Issue&dir=desc>

#### **Beneficiary Travel and Veteran Employees or Volunteers**

**Q:** Are veterans who work at a VA facility, and receive their care there eligible for Beneficiary Travel reimbursement when they have a medical appointment? What about Volunteers?

**A:** Should a veteran take AL or SL for the entire day of their appointment then they are eligible for Beneficiary Travel reimbursement. However, should the veteran present to work and only take a period of time for their appointment then they are not eligible for reimbursement. Volunteers are not employees and are therefore eligible for Beneficiary travel reimbursement whether or not they volunteer on the same day as their appointment.

#### **Veterans Traveling Together or Who Take Non-pay Transportation**

**Q:** Are veterans who travel together all entitled to Beneficiary Travel reimbursement? What about those veterans who take the DAV system or other "free" transportation?

**A:** Beneficiary Travel was authorized in order to help offset a veteran's actual expenses in traveling to VA health care or treatment. Should one or more veterans travel together in a private vehicle only the owner of the vehicle is actually incurring expenses and therefore is the only person entitled to travel reimbursement. However, should multiple veterans share a vehicle such as a Taxi where they all must pay then all are entitled to travel reimbursement. Remember though that reimbursement cannot exceed actual expenses in such cases. Veterans who take non-pay transportation such DAV transportation, VA Network transportation systems or other no-cost city, state or area systems are not incurring cost and therefore are not entitled to Beneficiary Travel reimbursement.